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Attorney Docket No. 028987.52349US
PATENT

TRAILER TOWING DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This application claims the priority of German patent application No. 102 31 223, filed July 11, 2002, the disclosure of which is expressly incorporated by reference herein.

[0002] The present invention relates to a trailer towing device for motor vehicles, and more particularly, to a device having a coupling neck which can be adjusted on the vehicle body between an inoperative position and an operative position and has a coupling ball at the end side and, at the vehicle body or a member, an adjustably held socket is provided for an electric plug connection of a trailer.

[0003] DE 200 16 618 US discloses a socket for an electrical plug connection on a towing device which can be adjusted along with the adjusting of a coupling rod between an inoperative position and an operative position.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] An object of the present invention is to provide an improved socket which can be swung in, on a trailer towing device, and which can be moved in a simple manner into and from

an inoperative position and an operative position so as to ensure a secure and covered arrangement on the rearward end of the vehicle.

[0005] This object has been achieved in a trailer towing device by providing that the socket is disposed on the vehicle body in a resiliently prestressed manner and, as a function of the adjusting movement of the coupling neck, can be adjusted by it, while being taken along, into a moved-out operative position and into a moved-in inoperative position.

[0006] Among principal advantages achieved with the invention are that, with the adjustment of the coupling neck of the trailer towing device, the socket is simultaneously taken along without any auxiliary devices, and the coupling neck and the socket can jointly take up a covered inoperative position at the vehicle.

[0007] For the foregoing purpose, the socket is disposed in a spring-mounted prestressed manner on the vehicle body or on a member and, as a function of the adjusting movement of the coupling neck, can be adjusted thereby, while being taken along, into a moved-out operative position and into a moved-in inoperative position and back again. In particular, the socket is swivelled by a pivot pin held on the member side about a horizontal axis in the vertical direction, such that, in the operating position, the socket is held by a spring element arranged on the pivot pin in an end position, and the spring

element is supported by its one end, on one hand, on the member side and, by its other end which faces away, on the other hand, on a finger-type stop part of a bearing plate of the socket.

[0008] As a result of this swivellable bearing of the socket and the course of the movement of the coupling neck from the operative position into the inoperative position, a continuous taking-along of the socket corresponding to the movement of the coupling neck of the trailer towing device can be achieved in a simple manner. The socket is subjected to the tension of the spring element and, when the coupling neck is adjusted into the inoperative position, places itself tightly against the latter and, after the taking-up, in the operative position can hold itself in a moved-out end position.

[0009] According to the invention, for this purpose, the stop part is provided and extends away from the bearing plate and, in the end position, reaches below a leg of the member connected with the vehicle body. By way of this stop part, the socket is stationarily supported on the member while under the tension of the spring element.

[0010] So that a continuous swivelling of the socket becomes possible in a simple manner when the individual positions of the coupling neck are taken up and special auxiliary devices, such as motors, control elements, cables and similar devices, are avoided, it is advantageously provided according to the invention that the coupling neck in the member can be swivelled about a

vertical axis from the operative position into at least one intermediate position below the socket situated in the end position. For taking up the inoperative position, the coupling neck is constructed to then swivel about a horizontal axis in the member, and an interior surface of the coupling neck is situated opposite the socket which, during a further swivelling movement, reaches under the coupling neck while resting there against and carries it along into the inoperative position against the tension of the spring element.

[0011] So that the inoperative position of the coupling neck and of the socket can be taken up, the socket, in the end position, is arranged below the member having two spaced legs and, in the inoperative position, can be swivelled between the legs into a clearance. During the adjustment of the coupling neck from the inoperative position back into the operative position, the coupling neck carries the socket resting upon it, and in the operative position of the coupling neck, the socket is arranged to be spaced away to a certain extent. Connecting devices between the socket and the coupling neck are not provided.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Other objects, advantages and novel features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when considered in

conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

[0013] Figure 1 is a view of a trailer coupling device with a position of a coupling neck and a socket in a moved-out operating position;

[0014] Figure 2 is a view of the trailer coupling device shown in Figure 1 but in a possible intermediate position of the coupling neck swivelled in toward the side;

[0015] Figure 3 is a view of the trailer coupling device shown in Figures 1 and 2 but in a swivelled-up intermediate position of the coupling neck;

[0016] Figure 4 is a view of the trailer coupling device shown in Figures 1-3 but in an inoperative position of the coupling neck;

[0017] Figure 5 is an enlarged perspective view of the coupling neck with a carried socket in an inoperative position;

[0018] Figure 6 is a perspective view of the trailer towing device as viewed from below the coupling neck with the socket in the operative position; and

[0019] Figure 7 is an enlarged perspective view of the socket with the bearing plate, the pivot pin and the stop part viewed from below.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] The trailer coupling device designated generally by numeral 1 essentially comprises a coupling neck 2 which can be

adjusted about a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, X-X and Y-Y, into an operative position II (Figure 1) and an inoperative position I (Figure 4) and back and which carries a coupling ball 3 on the end side. The coupling neck 2 is adjustable in a member 4 by way of an adjusting device (not shown in detail) about these X-X and Y-Y axes, which member 4 can be fastened to the vehicle body and has a clearance F between two legs 5, 6. Furthermore, a socket 8 is swivellable in the vertical direction (the direction of the arrow 16 in Figure 1) held at least on the leg 5 of the member 4 by means of a pivot pin 7. In particular, the socket 8 is arranged at a distance from the coupling neck 2 so that the latter can reach under the socket 8 during the adjusting operation.

[0021] As illustrated in detail in Figures 1 to 4, the coupling neck 2 can be swivelled from the operative position II by way of, for example, the illustrated intermediate positions III and IV into the inoperative position I and back. In this case, the coupling neck 2 reaches under the socket 8 and takes it along. The socket can, therefore, corresponding to the adjusting course of the coupling neck 3, be swivelled along from the moved-out end position E in Figure 1 into the moved-in inoperative position R in Figure 4 and back.

[0022] The socket 8 is connected with a bearing plate 9 which, in turn, is fastened to the pivot pin 7 as seen in Figure 7. By way of an intermediately connected spring element 10, the

socket 8 is held in the moved-out end position E in a supported manner by way of a finger-type stop part 11 (Figure 7) projecting from the bearing plate 9 on the leg 5 of the member 5 under the tension of the spring element 10. During an adjusting operation of the coupling neck 2 about the axis X-X from the operative position II into the first intermediate position III, the coupling neck 2 approaches the socket 8 such that an inner neck surface 12 is situated opposite the socket 8 from below.

[0023] As illustrated in detail in Figure 3 in the intermediate position IV, the coupling neck 2 is swivelled about the horizontal axis Y-Y. During this operation, the neck surface 12 reaches directly under and is in direct contact with the socket 8. In this intermediate position IV, the socket 8 rests on the neck surface 12 under the tension of the spring element 10. After a further swivelling of the coupling neck 2 about the vertical axis Y-Y, according to Figure 4, the coupling neck 2 takes up its inoperative position I and the socket takes up its inoperative position R.

[0024] In positions I and R, a portion of the coupling neck 2 and the socket 8 are arranged in the clearance F between the legs 5, 6 of the member 4. Because the member 4 is also covered by a body rear structure panel, the trailer towing device 1 is no longer visible from the outside.

[0035] The foregoing disclosure has been set forth merely to illustrate the invention and is not intended to be limiting.

Since modifications of the disclosed embodiments incorporating the spirit and substance of the invention may occur to persons skilled in the art, the invention should be construed to include everything within the scope of the appended claims and equivalents thereof.